REVIEW

In Our Own Hands: A Strategy For Conserving Biological Diversity in California. By Deborah B. Jensen, Margaret Torn and John Hart. 1990. California Policy Seminar, University of California, Berkeley. xx + 184 pages, appendices. (no ISBN no.).

This book reports on the present status of biodiversity in California, and reads like a casualty list from a disaster. With excruciating and painful detail, the extent of damage to California's rich natural history is outlined. If for no other reason, this text is important because of the excellent documentation of threats to the existing tattered fabric of biodiversity in California. However, there is more to *In Our Hands* than a collection of descriptive statistics.

The book begins by listing reasons for the preservation of biodiversity. The preservation of biodiversity is justified both on economic (e.g., ecological services, recreation opportunities) and aesthetic grounds. This discussion does a good job of the difficult task of enumerating the monetary benefits of conservation. Following sections explain how biodiversity is lost, how much is left (chapter three alluded to above), and the factors responsible for putting our remaining biodiversity at risk. One notable highlight in the first half of the book is the excellent discussion of water, water rights, and the impact on aquatic habitats. These first four chapters are a wealth of documented and undocumented information for the biologist writing significant impacts sections in EIR's as well as the concerned citizen.

The remainder of *In Our Hands* is devoted to explaining why the present system of agencies is unable to enforce adequately the preservation of biodiversity and proposing an alternative strategy. The alternative calls for, among other things, a habitat protection act and a California Biodiversity Research Institute. The explanation of the shortcomings of CEQA and reasons behind the failure of the lead agencies' enforcement of CEQA is enlightening, especially for those doing impact or mitigation work who are more comfortable identifying fungi than struggling with bureaucracy. This book is one of the few sources I've encountered which pointed out that the subjective nature of defining impacts and cumulative impacts poses a problem for the advancement of conservation, particularly at the level of the habitat.

There were two negative aspects of the book. First, the majority of the examples were drawn from northern and central California. This is to be expected given that the book was written in Berkeley. However, relying heavily on policy examples from the San Francisco Bay area doesn't further the cause of statewide biodiversity. Second and more important, the assumption that rural or suburban land conversion does not eliminate all native wildlife is misleading. (The definition of rural is fewer than six structures per ten acres.) True, mockingbirds, scrub jays and certain migrating sparrows will always be happy to rest or forage in a suburban setting, but where are the thrashers, grosbeaks, and wren tits? Native wildlife willing to share a golf course with people or a back yard with domestic animals are generally not species of concern, and the notion that low density is better than high density is misguided in light of shrinking areas of open space.

I applaud the strategies outlined in the final chapter of the book, but will voter support needed for implementation of a biodiversity research institute be available given the advertising dollars of special interest groups who have much to lose from increased vigilance over the environment? Land speculation has been part of California's economy since the gold rush, if not before. Suburban sprawl, fueled by white flight motivated by the social and environmental problems present in cities, is a critical link between land speculation and the incremental loss of open space, a leading cause of declining biodiversity.

The policy discussion ignores the relationship between the environment, the economy, and the social fabric, a relationship central to viable public policy for the

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preservation of biodiversity. Much attention was given to the possible consequences of global change on the diversity of California, but unless suburban sprawl is checked, not only will the impact of global change on biodiversity be insignificant, California will be doing more than its fair share to further the cause of global warming as a result of fossil fuel consumption.

In spite of these shortcomings, the authors have taken care to produce a scientifically correct text unintimidating to the non-scientist. *In Our Hands* belongs on the bookshelf of every environmental specialist and planner, both in the public and private sector.

—Cheryl C. Swift, Impact Sciences, Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA and Whittier College, Whittier, CA.

ANNOUNCEMENT

"Interface between Ecology and Land Development in California"

This will be the title of a symposium to be held at the annual meeting of the Southern California Academy of Sciences, 1–2 May 1992 at Occidental College in Los Angeles. The meeting will begin Friday morning with a plenary address by Dr. Peter Raven, followed by morning and afternoon sessions on both Friday and Saturday. It is anticipated that the symposium will consist of four sessions on: Biodiversity and Habitat Loss, Mitigation of Development, Restoration of Damaged Communities, and Wildlife Corridors. The focus of the meeting is to bring together persons involved in basic research, applied environmental consulting and governmental policy. Persons interested in participating or suggestions for related sessions should contact: Dr. Jon Keeley, Department of Biology, Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA 90041; 213-259-2958(fax).

ANNOUNCEMENT

Reprint Covers

In light of increasing concern over limiting resources, MADROÑO considers it environmentally sound policy to discontinue offering covers with reprints. It is hoped that authors will view this step in a positive light.